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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/16/2026  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [JA](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: CHINA-JAPAN RELATIONS: PRC SCHOLARS EXPECT  
CONTINUED DIFFICULTIES

REF: A) BEIJING 16819 B) BEIJING 16502

CLASSIFIED BY: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR DANIEL SHIELDS.  
REASONS 1.4 (B/D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: FOLLOWING PM KOIZUMI'S VISIT TO YASUKUNI SHRINE, CHINESE JAPAN SCHOLARS ARE FOCUSING ON WHAT APPROACH CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY ABE MIGHT TAKE IF, AS WIDELY EXPECTED, ABE BECOMES JAPAN'S NEXT PRIME MINISTER AFTER PM KOIZUMI STEPS DOWN IN SEPTEMBER. ABE WOULD PROBABLY BE ABLE TO AVOID CLARIFYING HIS STANCE, AT LEAST THROUGH THE END OF 2006, ON WHETHER HE WOULD ACTUALLY VISIT YASUKUNI AS PRIME MINISTER. THIS WOULD CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR A MEETING BETWEEN ABE AND A CHINESE LEADER LATER THIS YEAR, PERHAPS ON THE MARGINS OF THE APEC MEETINGS IN HANOI IN NOVEMBER. IN THE LONGER TERM, HOWEVER, JAPANESE DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS WILL FORCE ABE TO CLARIFY HIS POSITION SOMETIME IN 2007 ON WHETHER HE WILL VISIT YASUKUNI AS PM. THE CHINESE SCHOLARS WE MET DO NOT BELIEVE ABE WILL BE ABLE TO FIND A WAY TO STOP MAKING SHRINE VISITS WITHOUT ALIENATING HIS CORE CONSTITUENCY. IF ABE VISITS YASUKUNI AS PM, ANY POST-KOIZUMI IMPROVEMENT IN BILATERAL ATMOSPHERICS WILL QUICKLY EVAPORATE, THE SCHOLARS PREDICTED. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) PM KOIZUMI'S LIKELY LAST VISIT TO YASUKUNI AS JAPAN'S PRIME MINISTER ON AUGUST 15 AND CHINA'S "HARSH" REACTION WERE WIDELY ANTICIPATED IN BEIJING POLITICAL CIRCLES, CHINESE SCHOLARS GAO HONG OF THE CHINA ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES (CASS), JIN LINBO OF THE MFA-AFFILIATED CHINA INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CIIS) AND LIANG YUNXIANG OF BEIJING UNIVERSITY TOLD POLMINCOUNS AND POLOFFS IN AN AUGUST 16 MEETING. MEDIA SPECULATION ABOUT THE DETAILS OF KOIZUMI'S VISIT AND CHINA'S RESPONSE HAD BEEN PREVIEWED FOR NEARLY THREE WEEKS, THE SCHOLARS SAID. SOME VIEWED THE MFA'S STATEMENT CRITICIZING THE VISIT (REF A) AS SOFTER THAN CHINA'S REACTIONS TO KOIZUMI'S FIVE PREVIOUS YASUKUNI VISITS, ACCORDING TO CIIS'S JIN. BUT THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT WHEN KOIZUMI STEPS DOWN IN SEPTEMBER THERE WILL BE LASTING IMPROVEMENT IN CHINA-JAPAN RELATIONS ARE "OVERLY OPTIMISTIC," HE SAID.

BILATERAL TENSIONS TO CONTINUE AFTER CHANGE IN PM  
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13. (C) THE TENSIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND JAPAN OVER HISTORY RUN DEEPER THAN KOIZUMI'S YASUKUNI VISITS FOR SEVERAL REASONS, THE SCHOLARS SAID. FIRST, THE

FRICITION OVER HISTORY IS NOT PERSONAL TO KOIZUMI, BUT REFLECTS THE LACK OF A STRATEGIC BASIS FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN BEIJING AND TOKYO, BEIJING UNIVERSITY'S LIANG SAID. SECOND, ABES ATTITUDE TOWARD JAPANS HISTORY AND RELATIONS WITH CHINA MAY BE TOUGHER THAN KOIZUMI'S, JIN SAID. HE NOTED IN PARTICULAR ABE'S FAMILY HISTORY AND ADDED THAT ABE IS MORE IDEOLOGICAL THAN KOIZUMI. ABE'S OUTSPOKEN ADVOCACY OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS COULD FURTHER COMPLICATE JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS. FINALLY, CHINA LINKS YASUKUNI VISITS AND JAPAN'S HISTORY TO WHETHER CHINESE LEADERS WILL MEET JAPANESE LEADERS, JIN NOTED. NOW THAT THE LINKAGE HAS BEEN MADE, CHINA IS UNLIKELY TO QUICKLY BACK DOWN, EVEN AFTER KOIZUMI IS OUT OF OFFICE, GAO SAID.

POST-KOIZUMI TRANSITION A SHORT-TERM OPPORTUNITY?  
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14. (C) STILL, ABE'S LIKELY ELECTION AS KOIZUMI'S SUCCESSOR AS PRIME MINISTER COULD PROVIDE A SHORT-TERM OPPORTUNITY FOR JAPANESE AND CHINESE LEADERS TO MEET, PERHAPS AS SOON AS THE NOVEMBER APEC LEADERS MEETING IN HANOI, JIN SAID. BECAUSE ABE APPARENTLY ALREADY VISITED YASUKUNI IN APRIL AND HAS REFUSED TO COMMENT ON HIS FUTURE PLANS (OR EVEN TO CONFIRM HIS APRIL VISIT), ABES LIKELY ELECTION AS PRIME MINISTER PROVIDES A FACE-SAVING OPPORTUNITY FOR BOTH SIDES, ACCORDING TO BEIJING UNIVERSITY'S LIANG.

15. (C) IN THE LONGER TERM, HOWEVER, JAPANESE DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS WILL FORCE ABE TO CLARIFY HIS POSITION SOMETIME IN 2007 ON WHETHER HE WILL VISIT YASUKUNI AS PM. ON THE CHINESE SIDE AS WELL, THE MORE TIME THAT GOES BY, THE MORE PRESSURE THERE WILL BE FOR CLARITY REGARDING ABE'S INTENTIONS. CHINESE LEADERS WILL HESITATE TO MEET ABE IF THEY FEAR HE MIGHT VISIT YASUKUNI. THE CHINESE SCHOLARS WE MET DO NOT BELIEVE

ABE WILL BE ABLE TO FIND A WAY TO STOP MAKING SHRINE VISITS WITHOUT ALIENATING HIS CORE CONSTITUENCY. IF ABE VISITS YASUKUNI AS PM, ANY POST-KOIZUMI IMPROVEMENT IN BILATERAL ATMOSPHERICS WILL QUICKLY EVAPORATE, THE SCHOLARS PREDICTED.

16. (C) CHINA AND JAPAN ARE UNLIKELY TO BE ABLE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS IN ANY SUBSTANTIVE AREA UNLESS AND UNTIL YASUKUNI ISSUES ARE RESOLVED, CASS'S GAO SAID. ATMOSPHERICS ARE IMPORTANT TO CHINA AND JAPAN, HE SAID. RESOLVING THE YASUKUNI ISSUE IS NOT, BY ITSELF, ENOUGH TO IMPROVE CHINA-JAPAN RELATIONS, AGREED BEIJING UNIVERSITYS LIANG. BUT WITHOUT RESOLVING THE YASUKUNI ISSUE, BILATERAL RELATIONS CANNOT IMPROVE IN OTHER AREAS, BECAUSE DISPUTES OVER HISTORY WILL RUIN THE ATMOSPHERE FOR ANY TALKS, HE SAID.

CHINA URGES THE U.S. TO TAKE BEIJING'S SIDE  
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17. (C) ALL THREE SCHOLARS URGED THE UNITED STATES TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN RESOLVING CONFLICTS BETWEEN JAPAN AND ITS NEIGHBORS OVER HISTORY. THE UNITED STATES NOT ONLY HAS AN INTEREST IN BETTER RELATIONS BETWEEN ITS JAPANESE ALLY AND OTHER ASIAN COUNTRIES, LIANG SAID, BUT IT ALSO IS THE PRIME BENEFICIARY OF THE GLOBAL ARCHITECTURE ARISING OUT OF JAPAN'S WWII DEFEAT. POLMINCOUNS RESPONDED THAT THE UNITED STATES HOPES THE COUNTRIES IN THE REGION CAN WORK OUT THESE ISSUES THROUGH DIALOGUE.

18. (C) LIANG OFFERED THAT THE BEST CHANNEL THROUGH WHICH TO IMPROVE CHINA-JAPAN RELATIONS IN THE NEAR TERM IS A MULTILATERAL ONE THAT INCLUDES CHINA, KOREA, JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY FOR RESOLVING THE YASUKUNI ISSUE IS TO CHANGE THE NATURE OF THE SHRINE ITSELF, HE SUGGESTED. MERELY REMOVING THE GRAVES OF THE CLASS A WAR CRIMINALS FROM YASUKUNI WOULD NOT SATISFY CHINA AND KOREA, HE SAID.

OTHER ISSUES TAKE A BACK SEAT TO HISTORY

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¶9. (C) CHINA AND JAPAN HAVE MANY COMMON ECONOMIC INTERESTS THAT COULD BE PROMISING TOPICS FOR LEADERS TO DISCUSS IF RELATIONS IMPROVED, THE SCHOLARS SAID. CHINESE OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN EAGER TO WORK WITH JAPANESE ON ENERGY AND TRADE ISSUES, INCLUDING ENERGY CONSERVATION, WTO RULES AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, GAO OFFERED. POLITICAL ISSUES, INCLUDING TAIWAN, NORTH KOREA, JAPAN'S BID FOR PERMANENT MEMBERSHIP ON THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL AND TERRITORIAL DISPUTES IN THE EAST CHINA SEA ARE FAR MORE DIFFICULT, THEY NOTED.

WHY NO MASS DEMONSTRATIONS?

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¶10. (C) ALL THREE SCHOLARS AGREED THAT THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT IS NOT LIKELY TO PERMIT LARGE-SCALE ANTI-JAPANESE DEMONSTRATIONS SUCH AS THOSE THAT BROUGHT TENS OF THOUSANDS ACROSS CHINA INTO THE STREETS IN APRIL 2005. THEY JOKED ABOUT THE BRIEF AND PUNY DEMONSTRATION IN FRONT OF THE JAPANESE EMBASSY AUGUST 15 (REF B), SAYING THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT DID NOT WANT ANY LARGE-SCALE DEMONSTRATIONS BUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IT WOULD HAVE BEEN AWKWARD FOR BEIJING IF THERE HAD LITERALLY BEEN NO DEMONSTRATIONS AT ALL. UNLESS A NEW ISSUE ARISES, SUCH AS THE REEMERGENCE OF THE PROSPECT OF JAPANESE PERMANENT MEMBERSHIP ON THE UNSC, WHICH COMBINED WITH THE HISTORY ISSUE TO PRODUCE THE LARGE APRIL 2005 RALLIES, CHINESE CITIZENS ARE UNLIKELY TO TAKE TO THE STREETS IN FUTURE OVER VISITS TO YASUKUNI SHRINE, THEY PREDICTED.

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